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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that a sizeable number of students at the community college have attained a baccalaureate degree or higher and have returned to the community college to take credit courses. These post-baccalaureate reverse transfer students (PRTS) enroll in the community college for a variety of reasons, but one of the more common factors is related to career advancement. They may be taking courses to enhance their current employment, or they may be seeking a degree in a different area to make themselves more marketable. Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) examined the phenomenon of PRTSs on its campus in order to: (1) help streamline recruiting efforts to better target these individuals or the industries in which they work; (2) modify course offerings in order to better accommodate students with demanding schedules; and (3) examine the feasibility of converting career experience into credit toward certain types of technical degrees. The researchers determined from the student database that there were 184 PRTSs enrolled during the fall of 1991--165 held bachelor's degrees and 19 held master's degrees. These students took classes in 52 different categories. This paper examines the demographic statistics of this cohort, breaks down credit hours per course, and analyzes the implications of the research findings. (NB)

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Post baccalaureate Reverse Transfer
Implications for Community College Student Services

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Abstract: Post baccalaureate reverse transfer students (PRTSs) are those who have completed at least a bachelor's degree and who are attending a community college (Townsend and Dever, 1999). Many of these students have enrolled in courses at a community college for job related reasons. Some intend to pursue an actual degree program while others simply want a few classes, often technically related, to enhance their career opportunities. While tapping into any potential student population may be important at a time when institutions must become more competitive in order to recruit new students, PRTSs also present potential challenges for community colleges. This report will address the enrollment trends of PRTSs at Oklahoma City Community College and discuss ways in which the college accommodates the academic and student services needs of these students.

Historically, college enrollment patterns have been viewed from a linear perspective. That is to say that four year institutions are viewed as primary educational providers while junior and community colleges are viewed as intermediary institutions, places where under prepared students or students who have experienced academic difficulties at a four year school go to get acclimated to higher education. Once "on track," these students would then transfer to a four-year institution. However, a sizeable number of successful students, those who have attained a baccalaureate degree or higher, return to community colleges to take credit courses (LeBard, 1999).

Although PRTSs enroll in community colleges for a variety of reasons, one of the more common factor is related to career advancement. These students may be taking courses to enhance their current employment or they may be seeking a degree in a different area to make themselves more marketable (LeBard, 1999; Townsend and Dever, 1999).

While the rising trend in PRTSs may tend to elevate the status of two-year institutions in their communities and increase the likelihood that people will view these colleges as a valuable center for learning, PRTSs may also pose some challenges on campus. Some PRTSs may expect to bypass eligibility requirements and enroll in classes for which they have not met a curricular prerequisite (Townsend and Lambert, 1999). They may also resent being cycled through student services for authorization to take classes (Townsend and Lambert, 1999). After all, they have successfully traversed at least one higher education system previously.

Oklahoma City Community College has been committed to serving the people of central Oklahoma since 1969 by providing educational opportunities, including

certificates and associate degrees, business training, and continuing education programs. The College is also committed to ensuring that its graduates are prepared to participate in an increasingly global society. Finally, the College is committed to making a significant and positive difference in the lives of individuals and in the community as a whole. The College serves over 28,000 individuals each year. (Oklahoma City Community College, 2000).

Why study PRTS?

Oklahoma City Community College examined the phenomenon of PRTSs on its campus for several reasons. In the competitive climate of student recruitment, identifying who these students are and why they are choosing the community college could help streamline recruiting efforts to better target these individuals or the industries in which they work. Course offerings could also be modified to better accommodate individuals who may need to work coursework around a demanding work schedule. The college has been committed to offering more distance education options, but many of the more technical courses must still be taken on site. The college has also been examining the feasibility of converting career experience into credit toward certain types of technical degrees. Learning more about the College's PRTSs and the kinds of programs in which they enroll would give a starting point for addressing this issue.

Many students do not object to working within the system, but the systems don't necessarily work well with them. Oklahoma City Community College student services offices are open late one night per week during the semester and every night and on weekends during peak enrollment periods, but some students complain that access is limited for them if they need assistance at other times. The college is looking into ways

to possibly expand hours; knowing more about these students' needs would help with such a decision. The Center for Student Development and the Office of Student Support Services are also in the process of putting more information online so that distance education students can better access counselors or support services without physically coming to campus.

As economic changes occur and as technologies continue to advance, community colleges may expect to see more PRTSs on their campuses. Learning more about these students and their specific needs can help campuses develop more flexible and responsive programs and procedures to assist these students, and, indeed, a majority of their students gain the access that they need to quality programs and courses.

Methods

The PRTSs who were enrolled during the fall 1991 provided the sample for this study. The researchers utilized the student database to determine that there were 184 PRTSs enrolled during that semester. Of that number, 165 held bachelor's degrees and 19 held master's degrees. The aggregate enrollment for these students was 5223 credit hours, which was 28.4 credit hours per student. The study found that these students took courses in 52 different course categories.

Findings

Of these 184 students, 53.8% were female and 46.2% male. Of the overall credit student population during that time, 56.6% were female, and 43.4% were male. The ethnicity of the PRTSs was Caucasian (81.5%), African-American (4.3%), Native American/Alaskan Native (3.8%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.6%), Hispanic (1.6%), and Other/No response (7.2%) (see Table 1). The overall credit student population based

upon ethnicity was Caucasian (69.8%), Asian/Pacific Islander (7.8%), African American (6.3%), Native American/Alaskan Native (5.3%), Hispanic (3.9%), and Other/No response (6.9%). The average age of the PRTSs was 38, which was about 9 years older than that of the overall credit student population of the College at that time.

Of the 52 course categories, the researchers found that the most popular courses for PRTSs based on credit hours (CH) were computer science (801 CH), nursing (672 CH), biology (583 CH), electronics (347 CH), and mathematics (344 CH). The course categories with the least credit hour production were music (1 CH), semiconductor manufacturing technology (1 CH), film and video production (3 CH), astronomy (4 CH), and biotechnology (4 CH).

The researchers found that during this period, the aggregate GPA for this group was 3.62. Their course withdrawal rate was 6.2%, and their course pass rate was 92.2%.

Through spring 2001, 43 of these students had earned degrees from the College. They graduated from 15 programs with nursing (n=16) and computer science (4) having the most graduates. Other programs had only one to two graduates.

Implications

The information presented here suggests that the College's PRTSs are serious students who are seeking education for job enhancement and job transition. Their performance, in areas such as grade point average, withdrawal rate, and course pass rate, compared to the general student body is higher. These student outcomes are important in the College's efforts to promote the need for additional, as well as continued support and recruitment of these students.

As of the fall 2000, there were 239 of these students attending the college. This was a 30% increase over the fall 1998 enrollment. As the College attempts to access as many segments of the community as possible, while seeking to maintain and increase its enrollment, this group of students will provide a significant population from which to recruit. By identifying their needs and concerns, the college can successfully recruit and retain these students through proper programming.

As this group of students has many prior life experiences that contribute to their total learning experience, the College will explore how this experience can be utilized in their programs. By working with academic affairs, these students can possibly gain additional credit for prior learning that would be applicable to the programs in which they are enrolled at the College. This will decrease the amount of time and money, two critical factors in many cases for these students, which are required to complete programs.

Conclusions

Even though many argue that the community college's mission originated with a focus on the transfer function, it is important not to neglect the comprehensive nature of these special colleges, which includes vocational/technical education, continuing education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). Due to this commitment to the educational needs of the community, the community college's mission fluctuates from community to community to meet these needs.

Despite the traditional notion of linear transfer where students move from the two-year college to the four-year college, the post baccalaureate reverse transfer students represent a different type of student for the community college. These students seem to

present the community college with a dedicated and focused group of students that may benefit it tremendously as the support of higher education becomes more competitive. However, as the demographics and characteristics of these students are quite diverse, it is necessary to further study their needs and their intentions.

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Table 1
Ethnicity of Post Baccalaureate Reverse Transfer Students
N=184

Ethnicity	N (%)
Caucasian	150 (81.5)
African-American	8 (4.3)
Native American/Alaskan Native	7 (3.8)
Asian/Pacific Islander	3 (1.6)
Hispanic	3 (1.6)
Other/No response	13 (7.2)
Total	184 (100)

Table 2
Ethnicity of Post Baccalaureate Reverse Transfer Students by Credit Hour Production
N=184

Ethnicity	N (%)
Caucasian	128 (69.8)
Asian/Pacific Islander	14 (7.8)
African-American	12 (6.3)
Native American/Alaskan Native	10 (5.8)
Hispanic	7 (3.9)
Other/No response	13 (6.9)
Total	184 (100)

Table 3
Most Popular Courses for Post Baccalaureate Reverse Transfer Students
(By credit hour)

Course Category	Credit Hours
Computer Science	801
Nursing	672
Biology	583
Electronics Technology	347
Mathematics	344
Graphic Communications	228
Occupational Therapy Assistant	222
Child Development	221
Computer Aided Design	208
Respiratory Care Therapist	157

Table 4
Degrees Awarded to Post Baccalaureate Reverse Transfer Students (Spring 2001)

Program	Degree Recipients
Nursing (AAS)	16
Occupational Therapy Assistant (AAS)	6
Computer Science (AAS)	4
Computer Science (AS)	2
Electronic Technology (AAS)	2
EMT-Basic (Certificate)	2
Graphic Communications (AAS)	2
Respiratory Care Therapist (AAS)	2
Child Development (AAS)	1
Computer Aided Design (AAS)	1
EMT-Paramedic (Certificate)	1
Gerontology Tech (AAS)	1
Microcomputer Support Technology (AAS)	1
Physical Therapist Assistant (AAS)	1
Science (AS)	1
Total	43

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